

10-15-2018

# The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Georgia Southern University, Armstrong Campus

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/armstrong-philosopher-stone>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Philosophical Discussion Group, Georgia Southern University, Armstrong Campus, "The Philosopher's Stone" (2018). *The Philosopher's Stone*. 99.

<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/armstrong-philosopher-stone/99>

This newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the Armstrong College of Liberal Arts at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Philosopher's Stone by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu).

# The Philosopher's Stone

On The

## Ethics of Cannibalism

October 15th, 2018

Philosophical Discussion Group

Volume 21, Number 1

### A Thought Experiment on Cannibalism

by Caleb Kirby

[ck09860@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ck09860@georgiasouthern.edu)

#### Premises

It is a fact that humans are animals, and most humans engage in the act of eating other animals not of their species. This is done not only for survival purposes, but also for pleasure.

People do not want to think of themselves as \*just\* another animal, as this creates a sort of dread within people; we, as humans, enjoy a certain level of self-proclaimed (and potentially justifiable) "specialness" in nature. We like to think of ourselves in less clinical terms, as the mindframe of being just an animal can trigger feelings of existential angst; being just another sack of meat that can be slapped on a plate and put in the microwave isn't something most people draw comfort from.

Most people do not have qualms about eating animals, and even many vegans/vegetarians usually only take issue with killing/exploiting the animal, rather than actually eating it. Even if there are legitimate ethical objections to the slaughtering of animals for meat, and even more so for human beings, that does not mean a strong counter can be levied against the simple act of eating meat itself. For those who do take offense to the act of eating meat, I will ignore, as this is a larger topic that will simply distract from the issue at hand.



People fear cannibalism because of potential breakdown of society; even in societies where it is allowed, it should be noted that there is often a ritualistic, ordered approach to it. Civil society may exist with cannibalism, but it is typically not regarded as a justifiable excuse for murder. No one will cooperate if their neighbor might eat them; if the cup of salt Linda asked for this morning is going to be used later tonight in the chili she's going to cook from you, you're not very likely to give Linda that salt, are you?

Let us posit that the corpse being eaten was given willingly and holds no diseases/prions. Imagine, for this example, a society of cannibals who all agree to donate their bodies upon death for the others to eat, assuming the body itself proves suitable. A rigorous examination will be performed to ensure the donated body is free of any potentially harmful factors. The donor was of

sound mind, aside from whatever issues one might take with his cannibalism.

When a person of sound mind and character makes a final request in their last will and testament that won't inflict any harm, stress, embarrassment, or other negative state upon any party involved, it is courteous and lawful to go through with this request.

As the body is donated, and thus given willingly with the express permission by the donor to be eaten, there exists no danger of society being negatively affected by this act of cannibalism. No active harm is or has been done on the man being eaten, nor on society at large by breaking any laws or harming the public health. Because there are no diseases/prions, there is also no possibility of infection or disease spreading, so that potential danger is a non-issue as well.

Despite our magnificence and abilities, we are still animals at some level. Functionally, there is little actual difference between eating a cow and eating a human beyond the strictest observance of the meats; something has died and is being eaten to provide sustenance and survival. The aversion is because of society breakdown and the reminder of our own mortality; we may take issue with cannibalism for institutional reasons, but that is not a factor in this case. Thus, we are left to deal with the feeling of spiritual, existential discomfort which comes from eating another human being. However, I would like to present that this is more an issue of mindset than true ethical objection; there have and do exist societies, such as pre-colonial era Maori tribes, which view the consumption of human flesh as a highly spiritual practice in which the energy and power of the dead is transferred to the eater. If we eliminate the primary ethical hurdle, murder, then we are left with a practice viewed positively through a specific cultural lens; we avoid the use of a simple moral relativist answer to the issue, while still allowing for cultural relativity to remain a valid part of the discussion.

Because there is no active harm being done to society or the donator, and there is no true objective distinction one can call on to

differentiate the moral statues between eating a human and eating another animal, the cannibal society feast itself cannot be reasonably questioned. There are no negative effects which result from the act, and whatever qualms people may have can be chalked up to a comforting but potentially misleading sense of innate human superiority.

Because the body was specifically donated with the express intent of being eaten, the donor was of sound mind, and the act of cannibalism itself in this instance is permissible, we can assert that to deny the society the ability to eat their former member is morally ignoble; a willing, conscious, psychologically sound decision was made by the donor, and to deny that wish is a disservice to them.

### Conclusion

In fact, it becomes clear from this line of reasoning that it is actually more morally correct for the cannibals to eat their former fellow than for them to eat, for example, beef patty burgers. The cow was given no agency in the matter to decide its fate post-mortem, and it was deliberately killed in an industrial manner; to eat the burger is to enable the actions of a morally reprehensible (but undeniably tasty) industry, while engaging in this ethical cannibalism alleviates the moral responsibility for one's meal.

The Philosophical Discussion Group  
invites you for pizza without meat and  
for pizza with a meat whose source is  
unconfirmed  
on

Monday, October 22nd @ 5:15  
in Gamble 226

Contact Morgan Anderson with comments,  
questions or other thoughts:  
[ma07789@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ma07789@georgiasouthern.edu)